

April 25-

Christ demythologized

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TLS
68th Year 27 MARCH 1969 No. 3,503

Indivisible

Under the title of *The Visible Word* Herbert Spencer's report on his researches into the readability of print has now been made public. Mr. Spencer was appointed a senior fellow at the Royal College of Art to carry out this task under the sponsorship of the International Publishing Corporation, and last summer a preliminary version of his findings was circulated, which he has now revised. Essentially what he has done is to sift until resume a vast mass of previous research in this field, by printers, designers, psychologists, optometrists and a host of practitioners of other disciplines (or indispositions)—nearly 500 papers in all, according to the bibliography at the end. Being himself one of our most forward-looking typographers, he has set his summary in a framework of more or less current preoccupations, providing sections, for instance, on unjustified setting and on "paragraphs and indentation", and finishing with one entitled "towards a new alphabet". The

illustrations, as might be expected of the former editor of *Typographica*, are an outstandingly interesting feature of the book, which is published at 50s. by Lund Humphries in association with the Royal College of Art.

At one end they reproduce a number of unfamiliar nineteenth-century experiments, such as J. Millington's idea of running alternate lines mirrorwise, so that the eye moves evenly to and fro like the shuttle in a loom, or reading the words off in vertical columns, starting from the right. At the other they show various new alphabets designed for the cathode-ray tube or other electronic reading apparatus, on the principle that the norm in lettering, originally derived from carving and then from penmanship, will soon be the photo-electronic letter. The introduction points out, very rightly, that questions of spacing and layout too can no longer be considered only in the light of the printed page but need to take account of the television screen and the microfilm viewer. In short Mr. Spencer raises a number of basic questions, which anybody concerned with written communications would do well to take note of. Two in particular are worth stressing: the disproportion between the amount of material conveyed in this form and that portion of it which is actually needed by the reader; and the new opportunities for "the arrangement of words with visual logic rather than as continuous prose".

It is difficult however to overlook the fact that it is the job of research not just to ask intelligent questions but to investigate possible answers. This is where *The Visible Word*, alas,

falls down. To begin with, the existing research results which it summarizes are not always considered very critically—thus the unjustified setting of the *Kottbusch-Niemcewicz* is illustrated, but without any mention of the editorial drawbacks which led to that paper's modification, while failure to distinguish paragraphs clearly is not nearly so strongly enough condemned. Secondly, there is no kind of historical or biographical guide to such researches, which would give the interested reader some idea who originated them and why, or quite simply what the main directions of inquiry have been in the past half-century or so. M. A. Tinker, for example, had a hand in about twenty per cent of the papers listed in the bibliography, but there is no word to say who he is, or whether he himself ever drew more general conclusions from his studies.

The real pity however is that at the most interesting points in his argument Mr. Spencer seems to abdicate. Thus the new alphabets at the end are put before us without critical discussion; the slogan "towards a new alphabet" is propounded without any indication what the object is of some of the older innovations—the standardization of letter widths for example—or how they actually work. The notion of a new kind of discontinuous prose is illustrated only by Stefan Themerson's spatially wasteful concept of "internal justification" and by a so-called "square-span style of presentation" which one experiment allegedly showed to be "superior" to conventional typography, though without any clue as to how. The part played

in book-type publication, adjuncts as the index, the heads and even the footnotes, as aids to picking out the portion, clarity of language, use of punctuation to disambiguate are huge factors which are mentioned.

Is it stretching the word-legibility too much to suggest that it is a weakness? Not in our words, it does not really exerting prose or plain thinking that turns the reader from the page, or (more) number of such factors in relation. What does matter is to find the most efficient way of our evolving technology, of conveying a message to the reader who lacks this problem, in Spencer, from the typography need to be reminded how imaginative use of language tribute to its solution. Writers who want to see their work develop need more and more the factors involved in the printing and reproduction work. For them, adding *Visible Word* (which is a typewriter-set, with considerable grace), is likely to be of the fascination. But what the study of style, syntax, and editing which will give typographers some idea of the contribution "towards a prose"? It is certainly found in Mr. Spencer's book. Is their contribution then visible? Writers, we all know, "ment". Do they ever resist

harrowing if horrors kept or otherwise whined the clues. And the solution came in a sealed envelope at the end; though a far-sighted library could always have subtracted it before issue and even used it as a bait to make sure readers returned the dossier intact.

It is not only crime and espionage that lend themselves to the dossier form, which would also be depressingly apt for a huncamatum novel, reduced, say, to a Kafka exchange of letters between a Ministry and its veldt. The world of government has indeed been chosen for the first "programmed" novel, which Heinemann are publishing next month. This is called *A State of Emergency* and has been written by two civil servants, Dennis Guerrier and Juan Richards, characterized by her and programmed by him. The reader's job is to govern a newly independent African nation, but the armchair power-game has been simplified by giving Lakota a Western-educated, liberally minded Prime Minister and an English wife.

Heinemann are calling the book "a programmed entertainment", but they include a threat that "if the reader goes wrong, he has to return to make another decision", which means that *somebody* knows beforehand what is best for Lakota and for us. If the authors had been brought up on the Dennis Wheatley dossiers they might have done better still and exploited the use of rewards as well as punishments: such as a sealed envelope at the end with a K.C.M.G. in it.

The immediacy of it all seems to have worked very well, especially with the first of the series, *Murder Of Miami*, which sold freely and was translated into eight languages (were the clues also translated, and Gauloise bulletins substituted for Players?). But Mr. Gadney goes a little far in his determination to bring the experiment into line with the developments in the other, and talks about weaving in "actual clues" with fiction plots. The weaving was done with actual objects but not with actual clues: the Wheatley Links dossiers would surely not have satisfied anybody enough to have satisfied the people that now drive their cars to graveyards on the Moors or bid for a train-robber's cast-off toothbrush.

One of the awkward things about the dossiers and one of the reasons why, as Mr. Gadney explains, they never caught on and reformed the thriller industry as they might have done, was that they were necessarily flimsy and fell to bits; so much so that they are now very rare and worth ten times their original price of 3s.6d. Another inhibitor on their sale was that, like B. S. Johnson's recent venture, they were unsuitable for public libraries, since the original plot would be thickened at every

Amateurs of English prose who would like something a little richer than the *New Left Review* article edited by us a fortnight ago should try the March *Oxford Gazette*.

The light of Ages, now the Olive Atonement, holding the regenerative sound of life. The Holy mystery of complete rebirth, the Divine Radiance of His Holy FACE. The Heavenly FATHER whose opening LOVE is the mystery of every Illuminati, his unspoken embrace and his declaring penance. For the wonder and divine glory of HIS impenetrating Unfold, the hope and benignity of every bloodless Virgin. Thus shine on with all the Cosmo-Galactical Radiance, as the Barb takes its round from moon to night. That Divine Immortality becomes its radiant reward, as Nineveh awakens and becomes the Shining Glory of world, manifesting Rhythmic Vega.

After fifteen more pages, for the most part by the same authors, there



H. M. Hyndman



Sylvia Pankhurst

Communists in Britain

Kendall: *The Revolutionary Party in Britain 1900-21*, 453pp. P. 15s. 6d. New York: The New York University Press. 214pp. Allen Lane. 21s. 6d.

OVER a year ago the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution in Russia was marked with pomp and ceremony. In a year's time the British Party, in a smaller if not less way, may be expected to celebrate of its own a similar degree of the historical matrix of such risk, this is a work of real originality by the Professor of Psychology at the University of Strathclyde. 39s.

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What Is Philosophy? One Philosopher's Answer

Stephen Körner

This is a major attempt by a well-known philosopher to discuss the broad scope of philosophy in a constantly changing world, reporting on it and engaging it.

Allen Lane
The Penguin Press

more than a prologue to a closer study of the war years and the actual foundation of the Communist Party in 1919-21. He has used the Cabinet Minutes and Papers which are now available for this period at the Public Record Office, and has also examined the private collections of several of the Marxist or Communist leaders, such as John Maclean, J. T. Walton Newbold, Sylvia Pankhurst and Jack Tanner. He has been able to get in touch with several survivors of the period, among them persons who acted as couriers between the Comintern and Britain. These sources provide a good deal of fascinating evidence about the development of the movement in the critical years when war weariness gripped the working class and revolution spread throughout Europe.

Mr. Kendall shows that the pre-Communist Marxist left in Britain contained some very disparate elements. There was the British Socialist Party, in which a group of Russian Jewish exiles, passionately anti-Tsarist, helped to overthrow the old leadership under H. M. Hyndman which was supporting the war; there was the Socialist Labour Party, especially strong on Clydeside and active among the engineering shop stewards; yet owing its inspiration to the American Marxist Daniel DeLeon; there was the Workers' Socialist Federation, a body largely dependent upon the East End of London; and there was the South Wales Socialist Society, the outgrowth of syndicalist sympathies among the Welsh miners. These groups, in Mr. Kendall's opinion, would never have united into a single party without the skilful deployment of financial inducements by the Russian leaders, for they differed profoundly on such questions as whether to use parliamentary methods to attain power, and what the role of the trade unions should be.

The first representative of the Bolshevik government in Britain was Alexin Litvinov, who was granted certain diplomatic facilities by the Foreign Office, and who employed as his secretary a member of the B.S.P. executive, Joseph Fineberg. Litvinov was arrested in September, 1918, and deported; and his place was taken, clandestinely, by Theodore Rothstein, who was also a member of the B.S.P. executive. Both Fineberg and Rothstein had been harn in Russia, and their first loyalty was to the new regime. Rothstein indeed was to become Russian ambassador in Teheran, but his son Andrew served in the British movement. In 1921, however, there

was a succession of subsequent senior Comintern representatives, and there were couriers who smuggled in gold, jewelry and bonds to finance Comintern activities, until the transmission of funds could be regularized through the establishment of a Russian trading mission. Some of the agents appear to have been casual or accidental intermediaries, such as the Norwegian student Axel Zaehariassen; others were dedicated revolutionaries, notably Erkki Veltheim, whose task was apparently to develop a revolutionary movement in the British Army. The couriers came into touch with the British Marxist groups, and passed on to their chosen contacts both instructions and money. Scotland Yard was well informed about the nature of these activities, for its officers had managed to persuade a Russian-American courier, Jacob Nosivitsky, to allow his despatches to be opened and transcribed before delivery. Nosivitsky's information probably led the government to deport Theodore Rothstein from re-entry to Britain when he visited Russia in 1920.

It thus seems clear that the British Socialist Party and the Workers' Socialist Federation were receiving subsidies from Russia in the critical months of negotiation to form a Communist Party in Britain. According to the Cabinet Papers, the B.S.P. journal *The Call* received a subsidy of £25 a week; Sylvia Pankhurst also accepted custody of large sums, part of which she brought into the country herself on her return from Continental visits, part of which came from Zaehariassen. In the case of the Socialist Labour Party, the evidence of financial subsidy is not quite conclusive, though strong; but the S.L.P. was the one organization of the four which did not as a body join the British Communist Party when it was founded, though many of its leading members did. In addition, a sum amounting to about £75,000 was made available to the *Daily Herald* in the form of jewels which Francis Meynell, a director of the paper, brought back from Scandinavia in 1920. Meynell's fellow-directors, however, refused the money, and Meynell resigned, to become the first editor of the Communist Party's official organ, *The Communist*.

After the Communist Party of Great Britain was founded, money continued to flow in from Russia to support its activities and to develop new fields of agitation. Veltheim brought £300 for work in Ireland and also lent Jack Tanner £70 for his *Solidarity*. J. T. Murphy, the

Sheffield ship steward leader, who was in touch with the highest levels of the Russian leadership in Moscow in 1920, returned in December of that year with instructions to found a section of the new Red International of Trade Unions in Britain. He brought with him a substantial amount of money. As Mr. Kendall points out: "The ability of the Communist Party to offer well-paid, congenial, full-time employment... must have greatly increased its attractive power." This was particularly true in the early 1920s, when unemployment was at a high level and ordinary jobs in industry difficult to obtain.

Mr. Kendall's story ends in 1921, but evidently he feels confident that he has proved his point that the foundation of the Communist Party of Great Britain was not "a natural development of domestic trends". As for the later 1920s, police raids on the party headquarters in King Street, London, resulted in a good deal of publicity at the time about the movements of agents and funds. In 1925, for instance, a deficit of £4,000 on the *Sunday Worker* was met by the Comintern. Throughout the 1920s the Comintern had at least one representative in Britain—for a time it was Michael Horodin, who went on to a more significant career in China—and there were other agents for special purposes from time to time.

Mr. Palme Dutt, the former vice-chairman of the party, has recently admitted that he was worried by the situation, and in 1923 urged the "absolute cessation of any financial aid from the international movement to... Britain", but he encountered strong resistance from the Comintern leadership itself. Obviously the story of the party's internal discussions about the desirability of this aid would be a very interesting one if it ever came to light. Mr. Klugmann's official history absurdly attempts to make out that "Moscow gold" was a "ligament of anti-Communist imagination, and that the Comintern press was built up... painfully and in pennies" from party members and sympathizers. To be sure the pennies were painfully collected; but they seem to have been a small item in the accounts compared with the hundreds or thousands of pounds which were painlessly extracted from the Comintern.

Mr. Kendall thinks that the effect of the Moscow influence was to destroy a developing left-wing socialist movement in Britain—a movement of an ultra-democratic character,

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